

The University of Chicago

THE EARLY SHAKERS
AN EXPERIMENT IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNISM

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

1936

By
DARYL CHASE

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THE HISTORY OF THE EARLY SHAKERS AN EXPERIMENT IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNISM

THE PERIOD

This study does not discuss Shaker history in detail beyond the middle of the nineteenth century. During the latter part of that century disintegration went on rapidly. Yet while Shakerism was losing out in quantity it made some gains in quality; for the first time in its history some of its leaders could be called educated men and women. Thus a study of the "Early Shakers" will have little to say of their decline, and still less about their leaders of recent times. Very little that follows in the discussion of their religious practices, has been a part of Shakerism during the past seventy-five years. And much that follows deals with the Shakers who lived over a century ago.

THE SOURCES AND WHERE THEY ARE FOUND

Most of the large libraries in the Eastern part of the United States possess printed books on Shakerism; few of them have any manuscripts. A thorough study of any phase of the subject requires access to the Cathcart Shaker Collection in the Western Reserve Historical Society, located at Cleveland, Ohio. This is the largest collection of Shaker books and manuscripts in existence. Thanks to Mr. Cathcart who collected this material over a period of many years, the writer had all of this collection placed at his disposal. Small, but valuable, collections of manuscripts are also found at the Pittsfield Athenaeum (Pittsfield, Mass.), the New York Historical Society (Albany, N.Y.), the Library of Congress, and at the Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society (Columbus, Ohio). The New York Public Library has a large collection of books and pamphlets on the subject but no manuscripts. Dr. Edward Andrews of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, has an excellent collection of Shaker handicraft articles. The writer made use of all the collections of Shaker materials cited above, but except where otherwise stated, all the references to manuscript material which follow will be the library call number of the Western Reserve Historical Society.

ANN LEE AND THE BEGINNINGS OF SHAKERISM

Shakerism sprouted upon the soil of old England, but shot its main roots deep into the religious soil of New England. Ann Lee, its founder (1736-1784), was born of poor, uneducated parents in Manchester, England. She never learned to read or write and was a person of very ordinary intelligence. Her chief virtues were fearlessness, industry, frugality and neatness.

In 1758, at the age of twenty-two, she became associated with a group of thirty-odd religious enthusiasts who acknowledged Jane Wardley and her husband James as their leaders. A large number of the Wardley disciples had come out of the Quaker society and, as a group, they had more in common with them than with any of the other English sects of that day. They denounced war and society in general, and predicted the immediate return of Jesus; they owned no church property and placed no faith in ritual or sacraments. Like the Quakers they would sit together in silence until the "spirit" manifest itself in their midst. Due to their common practice of shaking violently when the spirit fell upon them, they were called in derision "The Shaking Quakers"; and although they have officially called themselves by other titles from time to time, they, like many other denominations, have never been able to escape the name given them by their first opponents.

If these followers of the Wardleys had not deviated from the religious customs of their day except in the realm of worship and practice they would have suffered little annoyance, but like George Fox, their religious activities were not limited to a few simple patterns of behavior that could be dubbed "religious eccentricities" by the sophisticated, and then ignored. In Manchester and the nearby towns of Bolton, Cheshire, and Mayortown, the Shaking Quakers denounced all institutionalized religion as organizations of anti-Christ. They not only confessed all their sins to each other, but denounced in no unmistakable terms all human conduct that they interpreted as social and personal sins.

Ann Lee soon became very active among these enthusiasts in their public denunciations, and consequently was a frequent victim of mob violence. Several times she was imprisoned as a disturber of the peace. Thus as a result of her zeal she gradually supplanted the Wardleys in their leadership. After her imprisonment of 1770 at Manchester until her death in 1784, she had no

rivals among the Shakers. From that time on she was called "Mother Ann," and within a remarkably short time was hailed by "Believers" as the female equivalent of Jesus Christ.

As one attempts to peer through the fog of miraculous stories that envelop the last two decades of Ann's life in England, he eventually discerns an ignorant, but very sincere factory worker arriving at the conclusion that all human sin and suffering, personal and collective, can be traced to sexual intercourse. It was during her Manchester imprisonment for disturbing the peace that she saw in vision the first human pair perform the act of coition and then she knew that the Bible story of the Garden of Eden was "not an eastern tale, but a divinely revealed historic fact." From that time until her death (1784) Ann Lee taught that all mankind was in a lost state and that the only way to spiritual recovery was first to live a virgin life. From that date on she refused to have sex relations with her husband, Abraham Stanley, and demanded that all her disciples join her in living the celibate life. This was her chief contribution to Shaker theology.

Ann Lee's vision in Manchester prison of Adam and Eve had been preceded by a life of poverty, marriage to a beer-loving husband, frequent childbirths, and almost as many infant burials, to say nothing of the general immorality that was quite general within her social strata. Her social, physical, and psychological status were not such as to insure her of wedded happiness. It is not necessary to search into the realm of the supernatural in order to understand why she considered sexual intercourse the source of all human misery.

Another important contribution made by Ann to Shakerism was to direct her followers to America. Its prospects for growth in England were not encouraging, and after Ann's departure for America in 1774, with but eight of her disciples, Shakerism is heard of no more in the land of its origin. After two years of hard work in the vicinity of New York City, Ann Lee and her poverty stricken followers settled in the woods of Niskeyuna, near Albany. Without delay they turned "their hands to work and their hearts to God."

Through industry and mutual sacrifice this little band of religionists soon had a clearing in the American wilderness and after about three years of comparative isolation found themselves

marks of suspicion. The one-hundred-percent Americans of that day called them "spies" and "foreigners" and hailed them before the local civil and military officers.

During 1781-83, after it became evident that converts could be found in America, Ann and several of her most capable followers (mostly Americans), journeyed eastward into New England on a missionary venture. Wherever converts were obtained persecution followed. They were hated as pacifists, religious innovators, as destroyers of families and robbers of family inheritances. Ann was the victim of mob violence on several occasions. On September 8, 1784, she "passed out" of her body, crying to her attendant: "I see Brother William coming in a golden chariot to take me home."¹ Hard work, living in a perpetual state of extreme emotionalism, persecution, and perhaps tuberculosis brought about her death at the age of forty-eight.

THE STATUS OF SHAKERISM AT ANN'S DEATH

There is little in the system of Shakerism that had its origin with Ann Lee. The perceptible development of the church during her lifetime was that natural development that came with the solution of problems growing out of an increase in membership rather than from any forward looking planning on the part of anyone. Ann's sacerdotal robe was little more than Jane Wardley's mantle with a bit of fancy needle work around the border. Ann became the "Mother" rather than Jane because she was younger, more audacious, consequently imprisoned more, a greater hater of all things pertaining to sex, and, last but not least, Ann, and not Jane, came to America, the most fertile seed bed for religious sectarianism.

At Ann's death their polity and theology were quite vague on most points; nothing had been written by a "Believer." In later years one of Ann's American disciples wrote that they had "little instruction for the enquiring soul, except confess your sins, take up your cross and be obedient."² However, besides the reports of enemies and apostates and "Believers" of that period, we can draw from written accounts that were written by some of Ann's

¹ Anna White and Leila S. Taylor, Shakerism (Columbus, Ohio, 1905), p. 65.

²MS BX9778 T5H7, Vol. II, p. 196.

contemporaries who have left evidence that they were honest intelligent reporters of what they saw. From such sources it appears that the following ideas and practices, which later became very rigid and clear cut, were in Ann's day manifest to some degree:

A. They believed that:

1. God is a dual being, i.e. both male and female.
2. Jesus was the male manifestation of God in the flesh and Ann Lee was the female.
3. With Ann Lee, the Christ had made his second appearance upon the earth.
4. All sin and wickedness are traceable to sexual intercourse.
5. The teachings concerning water baptism, the sacraments, the atonement, the resurrection, etc. are false.
6. Gifts of the spirit are again restored and that inspiration should take precedence over scripture.

B. Their most distinguishing religious practices consisted in:

1. Silent prayer before and after meals, and before retiring at night and again upon arising in the morning.
2. Complete confession of sin upon entrance into the society and as often afterwards as necessary.
3. Singing, dancing, and following the dictates of the spirit in church meetings.

C. Other distinguishing marks of the sect in Ann's day were that:

1. They advised all converts to devote their time and property as far as possible "to the building up of Christ's Church."
2. They encouraged the new Believers to withdraw from the "World" in all spiritual and material matters so far as it was convenient to do so. The men were advised to have uniformity in their style of hair cut and the women were to wear caps.

Although the above beliefs and practices were held by Mother Ann's followers before her death, they were not clear-cut or systematized. In the main it was loyalty to Ann as a person, and persecution from non-Believers which held the group intact. This fact is clear during the short period of leadership under Father James Whittaker, an eccentric English disciple who had accompanied her to America. For a short time it looked as though Shakerism was doomed to an early death, but fortunately for it as an organization, Father James died at an early age in 1787.

SHAKERS BECOME WELL ORGANIZED UNDER JOSEPH MEACHAM

Joseph Meacham, one of Ann's earliest American converts, became her second successor. And so far as future Shakerism was concerned it was a fortunate choice. Next to Mother Ann, Father Joseph is the most important character in the entire history of the sect. From the raw materials that were on hand he laid a foundation and left the plans for the completion of one of the most unique societies of religious communists that we have in history. It was under his direction that all private property was abolished. From his day on whenever a person became a member of the Shaker church he signed "The Covenant" which forever separated him legally from his possessions, and at the same time forestalled any future claims that might be made for wages. Meacham was one of the chief authors of the Covenant which has proved to be the backbone of Shakerism down to the present time.

Meacham is also to be given principal credit for the unique Shaker Church polity. In the process of organizing his communistic system he appointed Lucy Wright to be his co-equal in authority, and to direct the women while he led the men. She proved to be first of a long line of capable, charming women who have appeared in Shaker history. As time went on they eventually aimed at the following as their ideal church organization: Over all the Shaker societies should be a head Ministry, usually designated "The Lead," consisting of two women and two men. These four were not to be equal in authority; one man and one woman were to serve as companions and councilors to the other two. They were to be a self-perpetuating group and in their hands rested the supreme authority over all the societies. However, frequently in Shaker history only two have comprised the head Ministry, and at times only one. In fact in its practical operations one person usually dominated the "Lead" regardless of the number appointed--sometimes it would be a man and sometimes a woman.

Each Shaker village was divided into small groups called "Families." So far as it was possible each Family was a separate functioning economic and religious unit. All the villages (there were eighteen at one time) followed the model at Mount Lebanon. The following from Shakerism by White and Taylor is a clear statement of how the Family unit operated:

"In each family at Mount Lebanon, as in all other places

where Believers were gathered into community homes, there was a Spiritual Head--two Elders and two Eldresses, who had the spiritual life of the people in charge. They were the Shepherds of the flock, the Parents of the family. While not directly in control of temporal affairs, they were the final authority in all things, and their consent or "union," as the phrase is, was essential in every important particular. An order of Deacons was established, two of each sex in every family, in whom was vested control, direction and guidance in all temporal matters. There was also an order of Trustees to hold the property of the society, the real and personal estate, and to care for the legal protection and management of all property. At the head of all was the Ministry."¹

Besides the officers listed above there were numerous overseers, and minor officials for each of the industries. Most of the latter, including the "kitchen sisters," were shifted about from one position to another or back into the common ranks at short intervals, in order to escape monotony. All the officers, from the highest on down, did hand labor, but the Ministry had shops of their own and did not associate freely with the common members.

Closely associated with the Covenant, and the general organization of the church were the "Orders." These were the rules guiding the Shaker in all his activities. In Meacham's day and long afterwards, they were unwritten and were few in number, but before 1850 they had become so numerous that each society had a written copy of the essential ones which were occasionally read to the members in assembly. Before they collapsed under their own weight they directed Believers how to eat, sleep, walk, fold their hands, and which shoe to put on first. In Meacham's day the Orders were, in the main, guiding principles which could readily be memorized, but after the outbreak of spiritualism in their societies in 1837 so many were given by revelation that no mind could retain them all. The following are some of the Orders which the common Believer would hear read to him by his local Ministry. Copies were not distributed to the members in general:

"A. Orders Concerning the Confession of Sin

1. No Believer can be justified in keeping any sin

¹White and Taylor, op. cit., p. 77.

covered under any pretence whatever; but all are required to make confession thereof to those who are appointed in the order of God to hear them.

3. No member of the family who may be admonished or re-proved by the Elders, for any fault whatever is allowed to make any inquiry, or take any pains to find out by whom the matter was opened to the Elders.

B. Orders Concerning the Worship of God, etc.

1. All are required to attend meetings at the appointed time, and no one may be absent from meeting without obtaining permission of the Elders for the same.
3. Brethren and Sisters should not allow themselves to be gaping, or yawning in meeting.

C. Orders Concerning the Sabbath

1. No books except the Bible and Believers' publications may be read on the Sabbath.
2. Cutting of the hair, pareing of the nails, blacking or greasing of shoes or boots, and such like things, should not be done on the Sabbath.

D. Orders Concerning Verbal Intercourse Between the Sexes

1. The gospēl strictly forbids all private union between the sexes, in any place, case, or under any circumstances whatever.
3. Brethren and Sisters should not pass each other on the stairs.
4. Brethren and Sisters should not shake hands together.
5. Sisters must neither mend or set buttons on the Brethrens' clothes while they have them on.

E. Orders Concerning the Language of Believers

1. All filthy stories and all conversation which tends to excite lustful sensations are contrary to the purity of the gospel and are utterly forbidden..... All who hear or listen to such stories or conversation are required to open it before meeting.
2. It is ungodly for Brethren and Sisters to talk of rejecting their privilege in the way of God and turning back to the world.

F. Miscellaneous Orders

1. It is not allowable for Believers to attend Musiums, Theatres, or to attend Caravans or Shows to gratify

curiosity.

2. When the spirit is departing and a person is breathing the last, all present should kneel in prayer.
3. It is sufficient to dress a male corps in a shirt and shroud, a handkerchief, and a muffler if necessary. And for a female add thereto a cap and collar.
4. All wrestling, scuffling, beatings, striking, or fighting in any sense of the word, is utterly forbidden by the Gospel.
5. It is an established order for Believers to kneel before and after eating, when at home, and among themselves, and when among the world as far as consistent; and when kneeling in prayer and thanksgiving, all should close their eyes, and devote their souls to God.
6. Brethren should leave their rooms within fifteen minutes after the signal time of rising in the morning, unless prevented by sickness or infirmity.
7. No Believer is allowed to play with cats or dogs.
8. Beasts must not be called by the given or Christen names of persons.
9. The different species of animals should be kept distinct, each in its own order. No fowls may be set on the eggs of fowls of different kinds."

Haskett states that in his Family it was contrary to Order for anyone to write the Orders, for men and women to sleep together, to look at beasts when they copulate, to turn hogs and sheep together, to have watches, umbrellas, or money; to have a right and a left shoe, to go from one Family to another or out into the World without permission from the Elder; to shake hands with the World unless they tender their hand first; to fold the left thumb over the right in prayer, or when standing up in worship; to kneel with the left knee first, or with handkerchief in hand; or to put the left boot or shoe on first.¹

¹The above are gleaned from hundreds which appear in Shaker literature. Haskett was an apostate, but his book is quite fair to Believers. See William J. Haskett, Shakerism Unmasked (Pittsfield, Mass., 1828), pp. 168-185, for his discussion of their Orders.

SHAKER INDUSTRIES AND WEALTH

From the beginnings of Shakerism in America down to the present, the industrial foundations of their societies at New Lebanon and elsewhere have been agricultural and horticultural. But even before the death of Father Joseph Meacham (d. 1796), Shakers were making useful things to sell to the "World." Their great aim was to be as nearly self-sustaining as possible, so it was necessary for all their skilled tradesmen and mechanics to display their skill in order that the brethren and sisters might have shoes, clothing, hats, etc. It was only a short step from making articles for "home consumption" to supplying the same things for nearby townsmen.

The variety and quantity of their products are surprising to the investigator even after all the general agricultural items are deleted from the list. They raised sheep, cattle, hogs, and all kinds of foodstuffs, but they also produced seeds, medicinal herbs, wagon-whips, silver pens, mops, brooms, chair bottoms, all kinds of useful boxes, silk handkerchiefs, clothing, tools for the house and farm, furniture, etc. They also produced flax, and much of their woolen goods could be traced to the backs of their own sheep. In the Kentucky settlements they had their own silk worms. And although they were frequently warned through revelations and by their living Elders to abstain from all intoxicating liquors and tobacco, still the colony near Cleveland found it profitable to have a vineyard, so they produced wine, and some excellent red clay near one of the Eastern villages led them to the clay pipe business. Of all the numerous sects of religious communists from the days of Conrad Beisel down to the present time, the Shakers have shown the most skill in contriving new trades. They attempted to keep up to date with the new inventions which might be helpful to them in their industries. They lay claims to having invented or radically improved the following articles, stating that they have never received recognition in such matters because they declined to get patents: the screw propeller, Babbitt metal, a patented sash balance ("the best ventilator known"), a governor for an over-shot water wheel, a turbine water wheel, a threshing machine, a planing machine, a fertilizing machine, cut nails, the circular saw, an improved washing machine, clothes-pins, an apple parer, the flat broom, metal pens, etc.

Through mutual help, industry, thrift and the occasional conversion of a person with property, the Shaker Families generally prospered. However, they rarely ever had large sums of money on hand at the end of a season, their wealth consisting in houses, lands, shops and supplies of various kinds that could be consumed or turned into cash. Few of the Families kept accurate books from year to year so it is impossible to indicate the rate or the increase of their prosperity. Perhaps the most accurate account on record for the entire church at any given period is the estimate presented to the Treasury Department of the Federal Government in 1869 by Durbin Ward, Council for the Shakers. In presenting his case to the government showing that they should not be listed as a single person in computing their income tax, he claims that to date (i.e., 1869) there were between three and four thousand members with real estate and factories having an assessed value of \$2,267,000.00. Their personal property was listed at \$364,528.00. For his purpose, one can readily believe that he would be inclined to push the membership of the church up as high as the "law would allow" and the value of the property as far down as possible. In 1879 Hinds estimated the aggregate Shaker wealth at twelve million dollars; this is doubtless a gross exaggeration.

Their cash balance was always low at the end of a year because it was customary for a prosperous Family to purchase more land, erect new buildings or assist some of the less fortunate Families by granting them out-right gifts of money--sometimes hundreds of dollars. Old Shaker journals reveal that few societies, modern or ancient, have equaled them in their generosity to the poor or to those visited by floods, fires, earthquakes, and wars. Most of their generous gifts were the products of their fields and the workmanship of their hands, but many cases are on record where they gave large sums of cash to sufferers both inside and outside the Shaker fold.

SHAKER RELIGIOUS GATHERINGS

Neither the private nor the public religious services of the early Shakers possessed much that fed the intellect or satisfied the sense of beauty. Their songs were without words, and their "dance" was little more than violent stamping or swift whirling. They believed that through these violent exercises

they could subdue their "carnal natures." The following is from a Shaker journal which gives a vivid picture of a private meeting when every one was enthusiastic:

"Meeting usually begins by singing an anthem or a hymn, then the people prepare to labor. Singers place themselves & after singing sometimes one or two songs, the singing is entirely drowned by the different exercises & the sound is like mighty thunders. Some are stamping with all their might, & roaring out against the nasty beast & filthy whore, which has made all nations drunk with wine of her fornication. Others turning with great power & warring against the flesh, while at the same time, a number are speaking with new tongues, attended with such majestic sign & motion that it makes the powers of darkness tremble. Yea, & the good believers cry out with thankfulness to God, for the special notice of God to them. The meetings frequently continue with such like exercises for two hours without cessation, tho sometimes there is a pause, long enough to partly sing a hymn, & then begins more violence than ever, so that by the time meeting closes the people will be as wet with sweat, as tho they had been plunged in a river."¹

The first Shaker "hymns" were popular tunes of the day with meaningless sounds of "ol doleo ol do lo" substituted for words. Later they wrote countless hymns of their own composition. The following are typical of some of their early verse which they sang and which they frequently pantomimed.

"The Devil is walking the earth to and fro,
Has stamped the whole human race;
This awful impression believers do know,
Great I in the front of the fact."

When they got to the last line, they would put their hands up to their foreheads.

"I love my faithful brethren more
Than any souls I've seen before;
Their spirits are so clean and pure,
They are so kind and clever;
I love to see them stamp and grin,
And curse the flesh, the seat of sin,

To all such would I feel akin,
I will love them forever."

"When they came to the words 'stamp, and grin,' they all in concurrence gave a violent stamp, and then grinned in the most frightful manner."¹

Many of their songs consisted in long verses against their "carnal natures" or their "fleshly kindred," i.e. their parents and more distant relatives:

"You that are defil'd with woman
You that love the darling sin
Cast away your filthy dreaming
Let the King of Glory in.
While you live in carnal pleasure
Your profession's but a sham
Virgins have the Gospel trasure
None but such are with the lamb.

Voice of truth roar on like thunder
O ye forked lightnings play
Rend the veil of flesh asunder
Leave the World in open day
Hallelua hallelua
Let the devils kingdom fall
Hallelua hallelua
Christ shall soon be all in all."²

The following are the first and last verses of a "hymn" which was written sometime before 1821. Its title is "My Gospel Relation." It is among the uncatologed material at the Western Reserve Historical Society.

"My Gospel Relation are dearer to me
Than all the flesh kindred that ever I see
So good & so pretty so clever they feel
To see them & love them increases my zeal
Oh how pretty they look
how pretty they look
how clever they feel

¹Haskett, Shakerism Unmasked (1828).

²From an uncatologed MS hymnal at the Western Reserve Historical Society.

Of all the relation that ever I see
 My old fleshly kindred are furtherest from me
 So bad & so ugly so hateful they feel
 To shun them & hate them I feel the most zeal
 O how ugly they look
 how ugly they look
 how nasty they feel."

Some of their enemies have accused them of dancing and swimming together naked in order to demonstrate to one another that they had conquered the "lusts of the flesh." This and similar accusations are doubtful, but it must be admitted that their own records show that in their private meetings vile language was uttered "in the spirit," and that excessive hugging and kissing were sometimes indulged in by members of the same sex. Many of their private "hymns" are not only crude in literary quality, but border upon the indecent. The following indicates to what extremes they would go at times:

"We sung several songs on our knees for we have become so used to standing on our knees, that it is almost as natural for us as it is to stand on our feet..... Then Elder bro. said let us arise from our knees & greet each other with a kiss of charity, then we may be dismissed. So we all went to hugging & kissing in good earnest, & loved a heap..... It appeared to me that the heavens were opened & I was worshipping with the Angelic host. Some times the Brethren & Sisters were passing & repassing each other--sometimes hugging & kissing the sweetest kisses that I ever tasted, for we felt love enough to eat one another up. Sometimes the Brethren and Sisters would follow each other around and around sometimes they would have hold of hands, three & four & sometimes a dozen in a ring, waving up and down....."¹

Obviously such extremes were not indulged in at their public meetings, but even on such occasions there frequently were "things" said which embarrassed the curious visitors who had decided to "spend the day" with the Shakers.

SHAKERS AND SPIRITUALISM

It was not an uncommon thing for the Shakers in the days

of Ann Lee to follow their outstretched arm about, talk in tongues, prophesy, read men's thoughts and place imaginary marks upon some of the astonished and bewildered spectators who attended their meetings. All of this strange behavior was labeled as "gifts" by the Believers and to them they were infallable proof that in Ann Lee they were witnesses of Christ's second appearance. Although there was a tendency for much of the spectacular and eccentric elements of Shakerism to be sloughed off between Ann's day and 1837, or at least for the more extreme "gifts" to be reserved for the Shaker Union Meetings where outsiders were not admitted, still it was common for Believers to have many experiences which they attributed to supernatural agencies. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the new converts, which were added to the Shaker fold from the Kentucky Revival, danced, barked, jumped, sang, prophesied, went into trances, and saw visions, as the spirit took possession of them. In fact, such behavior and beliefs, then as now, were not limited to any sect, but in the main were a direct reflection of the culture of those who so believed and acted.

Shaker journals reveal that all during their history until the outbreak of spiritualism in 1837, members would occasionally make claims of having seen God, Ann, Jesus, or even some of the spirits of departed world leaders, etc. In 1837 there was not only a flood of experiences which up to that time had been comparatively rare, but many new aspects of the phenomena appeared. Ann Maria Goff, age fourteen, a member of the Watervliet society, was the first to attract much attention. The following excerpts from old Shaker journals which go back to that period show clearly that there is no basis for the high claims of Conan Doyle for early Shaker spiritualism:

"Mother Ann came and took me to a large prison. It was a large space walled in, and there were 4,000 wimmen chained there in darkness. Jesus was there. Jesus and Mother began to tremble and shake, and their chains begain to loosen, and the evil spirits came out of them..... We then went to a beautiful bright white house, which shone so bright that I could hardly look at it..... It was called the house of Jesus. We entered a room that was full of little girls dressed in gold color, with crowns on their heads, and stars on their shoulders, and on their feet, and a bright light on their

hand..... Jesus put his right hand on their heads, and called them his babes; and seemed very fond of them. They bowed to him and appeared pleased with his notice. They labored and sung and looked very pretty. We entered a room where the boys were, and they looked very much like girls, only they appeared like boys. They sung and labored. One they called little Jesus. They said he looked as Jesus did when a babe, and he seemed like an Elder among them. I then returned home having been gone 8 hours. Ann Marie."¹

Sometimes the youths would dramatize their experiences while they were in the "spirit," and not remain in a state of trance. The following is recorded of what "Elizabeth," a girl friend of Ann Maria Goff, did while in the spirit on December 10, 1837. It is taken from the same source as the above:

"She went into vision about 20 minutes past 8 oclock A.M. and at first appeared to be walking. After ascending a flight of 193 steps, she said, 'That's pretty.' Am I here?' She looked pleased, but solumn, and was very still. The external sign of going up stairs was made by placing the heel of one foot upon the toe of the other alternately. After this she bowed a good deal....6 times, then 5 and then 3. She then appeared to be trying different manners of laboring. One manner was represented by crossing her feet, another by lightly tapping, first with one foot, then the other. She said 'I cant Betsy:' seemed to be trying hard to learn something like the double shuffle..... After this she ran, smiling and bowing, and then suddenly exclaimed. 'Why! what did you say that for when you know you did? You did do it. Mother Ann said you did. Dont be making motions and saying hush! hush! I didnt I didnt! You did do it. etc. etc."

From such simple beginnings came all the happiness, heart-aches, deceptions, abuse of power and expenditure of time and money that were associated with Spiritualism for over a decade.

Within a few months after Maria Goff had her visions every Shaker Society from Maine to Kentucky was flooded with them. Early Shaker writers interpreted this general and widespread outbreak of spiritualism within their societies as indisputable evidence that Mother Ann had not forgotten them or that Father Jesus

or some of their departed leaders were ever on hand to instruct and assist. Later Shaker apologists have attempted to place a cloak of intellectual respectability over that entire period of their history by ignoring most of the material on the subject found in the old manuscripts, and by explaining the rest in terms of a pseudo-scientific psychology. However, one is not compelled to resort to the realm of the supernatural or to the frothy field of investigation termed "psychic phenomena" to understand the rapid spread of Spiritualism throughout every Shaker colony within a short time after its introduction.

New Lebanon, the headquarters of the Ministry, is but a short distance from Watervliet where the Goff girl and her companions had their visions. Without delay these visions were called to the "Lead's" attention and they were pronounced genuine divine manifestations. Perhaps one reason for this decision was the frequent revelations by the inspired ones which admonished all Believers to "follow the Lead at all times." They were also saluted by the visionists with such flattering titles as "God's Holy anointed ones," etc. The records show that shortly after one of the societies received a letter or a visitor from the head Ministry telling of their approval of the visions and revelations at Watervliet, the same behavior would manifest itself among them.

Trances, talking in tongues, visions and revelations became daily occurrences. Hundreds of spirit communications were recorded as coming from God, Mother Ann, Jesus Christ, King Solomon, George Washington, John Wesley, and from savage tribesmen, etc. Several long books were the products of the Shaker visionists and were published. A copy of one was sent to "all the rulers of the world as a voice of warning." Most of their inspired songs and other communications never got beyond the society which produced them until they were placed in the Western Reserve Historical Society or some similar library. Most of the messages and the pantomime which frequently accompanied them merely furnished harmless amusement. But in some cases under the direction of unscrupulous Elders, revelations were manufactured to crush an opponent. Richard McNemar, one of the outstanding men of their history, was such a victim.

In 1848, when the Fox sisters began astonishing the world, the Shakers contacted many of the spiritualist leaders and told them what had been going on in their villages for over a decade.

Thus through Spiritualist leaders the Shakers contacted the outside world in many ways unknown to them before that time. Public meetings were held with Spiritualists, and one of their leaders made a trip to England with a Spiritualist lecturer. It was during the Spiritualist enthusiasm that the Shakers received so many "Laws" and "Orders" that every detail of their lives was regulated by code. Their contacts with the Spiritualists also marks their rapid decline.

SOURCES FROM WHICH SHAKERS DREW THEIR CONVERTS

The growth and stability of the Shaker society were completely dependent upon its power to attract new converts. The majority of those who sought admittance without being urged by missionary activity, were looking primarily for a haven of refuge from economic storms or for an escape from unhappy married life. Many of the first converts came from those districts where Shay's rebellion was most serious. To such people, the Shaker village was a veritable kingdom of God. And there can be no doubt but that many married people with property looked upon their new religion as a veritable God send, releasing them from sexual maladjustments without their running away from their partners and children, or attempting freedom through the agency of the severe divorce courts of that day. From the time that Shakerism showed visible signs of prosperity until rigid rules were established for admittance into the society, it was besieged by the aged, by those hating the flesh, by the sick and those who could not or would not make a living in the "World." Many such were admitted.

A more desirable source of increase for the colonies was through the children who were brought by parents, friends or relatives for the Shakers to rear and educate. The only home that hundreds of American children have had has been the Shaker societies. Those accepted were well-cared for according to the standards of one hundred years ago, yet the discipline was so severe and the simple Shaker life was so uneventful that few of the boys remained in the villages after they became of age. On the other hand, many of the girls found Shaker life agreeable to their temperament and spent their entire lives within the church.

However, in its early days Shakerism did not depend upon its growth from those who brought children to be reared, or from those seeking shelter from money or marriage difficulties.

Neither did it depend upon the few idealists, pacifists, communists, or religionists who came on their own initiative, thinking that in the Shaker village they would find the long sought after Utopia.

The early Shakers numbered among themselves vigorous, capable missionaries. Mother Ann set the precedent in her day for missionary activity, when between May, 1781, and August, 1783, she and several of her able assistants visited thirty-six towns and villages in Massachusetts and Connecticut. But after the days of Mother Ann (d. 1784) most of the Eastern societies were founded by dissatisfied persons who took the initiative and invited the Shakers to "teach them the gospel." On the other hand, Shaker missionary work in the West was responsible for a series of events that are unique in American church history. In this most important of all Shaker proselyting ventures, the Believers did not wait for an invitation from anyone. Zealous missionaries who called themselves "God's hunters" traveled thousands of miles through Ohio, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Indiana, searching for new disciples.

It was as a result of the newspaper accounts of the great revival of the West that Issachar Bates, John Meacham, and Benjamin Youngs, Shaker missionaries, started for Kentucky on January 1, 1805. Within a comparatively short time they met with brilliant success in Ohio and Kentucky. Among their most important converts were Richard McNemar, Mathew Houston, John Dunlavy and Malcolm Worley. The last was a man of property and it was on his farm in southern Ohio that the first Shaker Village of the West was established. The other three were leading New Light preachers who with Stone, Marshall and Thompson, had made great inroads upon the orthodox churches of that section, the Presbyterians in particular. Shaker historians claim that 3400 members were added to their church between 1805 and 1825, and that 1800 of them were brought into the Western societies.

Besides the efforts of the capable and self-sacrificing missionaries who opened the work in the West, the generosity of the Eastern societies in furnishing money to purchase land and supplies, accounts for much of their growth on the frontier. Between 1805 and 1813 the Eastern societies spent \$13,095.00 exclusive of wagons and horses (to say nothing of the various kinds of articles and presents of money from individuals), "for

the establishment of Mother Ann's gospel" in the West. Large sums were also sent after that date. Shakerism never had the capacity to start a revival outside its own societies, but from time to time it did profit from such emotional explosions which left ex-church members adrift. Keeping in mind the economic program of the Shakers, it can be said that their first converts were the results of the Great Awakening in New England, and the other main sources were the great revival of the West, and later the Millerite excitement.

SHAKERS AND THE "WORLD"

The early Shakers attempted to do what numberless religious sects before their day and since have set out to do: They attempted the impossible feat of living in close contact with the "World" and yet tried to be not of it. And like many other churches, when they gradually sloughed off their eccentricities and by imperceptible degrees took on many of the thought and behavior patterns of the World, they interpreted the friendliness which resulted as evidence that in some mysterious way the World had become Shakers at heart, if not formally initiated into the sect. Moreover, as time went on, the well established churches realized that Shakerism in no way endangered their growth or stability; thus a tolerant, big-brother attitude was extended toward them by most of the orthodox groups.

Unlike many of the early monastic leaders, the Shakers did not seek the isolated and desolated spots of the earth, away from the highways and marts of men. The "World" was their next door neighbor, and no material wall separated the two. Furthermore, through their constant buying and selling and their clash for many years with the civil authorities over their pacificism their separation was always quite limited. Their journals show that they were visited by one president, several governors, important officials from foreign countries, literary men and leaders of socialistic thought.

But some of their most important contacts with the "World" were with the strange and unorthodox religionists of America in their day, and it was largely through such relationships that their religious ideas developed. Chief among the lot were the revivalists of New England who later became Free Will Baptists, revivalists of Kentucky who at first were known as New Lights,

and later the Adventists, and the Spiritualists. To these larger groups should be added the followers of Shadrack Ireland, the "Come-Outers," the Perfectionists, and the "Mummy Jums" of New England. From the West we should add to the list the Rappites, the Inspirationists, the Zoarites, the Owenites, the Halcyonites; and from the South the "Nazarites." To this list could be added the names of numerous "prophets," "seers," and "revelators," mostly from New England, who were common visitors to their village. Jemima Wilkinson and Mother Ann were of the same spiritual kinship.

It is impossible to evaluate with accuracy and justice the contributions of the Shakers to American society because so many of their contributions have been in that realm which does not lend itself to statistics. However, Shaker influence and contributions can plainly be seen in the following fields: the numerous religious and non-religious systems of communism that have been attempted in the United States since the turn of the nineteenth century have had before them the Shaker experiment as a demonstrable example of economic success. Their broad acres, high barns and roomy dwelling houses were undisputable evidence that "it could be done." From the very beginning Shaker communities were models of industry and cleanliness to all those who came in contact with them in any way. The early Shakers had few peers and perhaps no superiors in the field of farming, seed growing, stock raising and "home manufacturing."

Shaker villages have been the homes of hundreds of orphan boys and girls, and the children of the poor, where they learned trades and developed skills and useful habits that made them self-supporting good citizens in later life. They were havens of refuge and shelter to men and women who could not adjust to the normal complexities of life. And through their unstinted generosity to those in need of material assistance, and through their uncompromising stand against war, they are to be numbered among the leading humanitarians in American history even though their membership has never been large. Although it is doubtful that Shakerism has had great influence upon the larger denominations of America or such movements as "women's rights," still many parallels exist between them and the Mormons, and much in Mrs. Eddy's theology was taught by Mother Ann Lee. Theodore Parker's "Mother-Father" God idea can be traced directly to his Shaker friend,

White. And from their first arrival upon American soil the Shakers have struck at Christian orthodoxy concerning the Christ, His second coming, baptism, and the resurrection. Whether this blow has been severe or light the reader shall be left to decide.

